

New Covenant?

We are here today because of the faithfulness of a particular man who we loved very deeply and very dearly, Herbert W Armstrong. It's worthwhile, at times, to reflect a little on the way in which God had prepared him for the role he was to undertake. He was born into a family who were Quakers. His religious background, if it was such, was Quaker. This may not seem very familiar to most of us, but the distinguishing factor of the Quakers was the fact that they did not get involved in dogma and doctrine. They were described as being a pietistic group. They were concerned about piety, about behaviour. That is why they came to be known as "The Society of Friends."

The term "Quaker" was a pejorative term. When George Fox was before the courts in England in the 18th century, because of what they believed, he told the judge that, "People were supposed to quake at the Word of God."

So the judge said, "Oh, you're a quaker!" So the term stuck to them. The important thing about the Quakers is that they believed in their relationships with other people.

Apart from that, Mr Armstrong had very little religion prior to his calling. In many ways, in a very religious society, Mr Armstrong was called with a very blank religious mind. It was a mind that had not been muddled and clouded by religious disputes that affected various of the other churches that were concerned about doctrine and dogma. Mr Armstrong had a *tabula rasa* in terms of his calling, in terms of religion. God provided a FRESH mind that He could challenge in terms of His Word.

As Mr Armstrong developed, so much of his writing was challenging the religious ideas that existed in the world. He would challenge accepted beliefs of the churches. He himself had to be challenged in the first instance. He was very much aware of the behaviour of Christianity. He understood that "everyone kept Sunday." As he told his wife when she challenged him on it, "How can all of these other churches be wrong?"

He undoubtedly knew about Easter. He knew about all of these other doctrines, but it was very much at arms length, rather than intimately involved.

So, after he had been challenged and had come to prove the existence of God and the Sabbath, God was able to then use him to challenge other beliefs that people held to. So Mr Armstrong wrote booklets on subjects such as "The Tongues Question," or "How Often Should We Partake of the Lord's Supper?"

There was a whole series of booklets, "Just What Do You Mean ... Conversion, Salvation, Predestination," etc, etc. He went through one subject after another and he challenged people to understand from God's Word, what God's Word really did say about this particular subject.

Mr Armstrong was used in a very powerful way to lay a foundation for the Church. The resources that he had at his hand were principally written by Protestants. They were written by men who were church men themselves. Oftentimes their church's teachings were reflected in their writings. So he had imperfect sources to work with.

Today we have many Bible aids and books that are written by people who have no real religious affiliation whatsoever. People look at the Bible today from a purely academic viewpoint. It means absolutely nothing to them. They may seldom, if ever, go to church, because they see it as purely an academic study.

One particular point that highlights the problem that we face is the fact that we talk about the "New Testament." The first time the books between Matthew and Revelation were referred to as the "New Testament" that we have a record of, is towards the end of the second century. Prior to that, they were never referred to as the "New Testament." If they were referred to, they were referred to as the "Apostolic Writings," or the "Gospels," the "Epistles," and other names that we would use for them today.

I have been trying to find out a little more about that. I have a couple of Greek New Testaments. One is the United Bible Society's Greek New Testament. The entirety of the New Testament is in Greek, except that it doesn't have a name in Greek! The cover says (in English), "The Greek New Testament." There is nothing inside, in Greek, that says, "New Testament," because it didn't originally have that name!

Another one I have is German. This is Nestle-Aland, the German Bible Society Greek New Testament. They gave it a Latin title: "*Novum Testamentum Graece*" (Greek New Testament)

The New Testament didn't have a title "New Testament," just as the Old Testament didn't have a title "Old Testament." Yet these terms have entered the whole realm of Christianity over the last 1800-1900 years. What happens? When people hear the term, "New Testament," and "Old Testament," what does it do? It privileges the NEW at the expense of the OLD!

It's an incredible thing to stop and consider. The New Testament Church all received the promise of salvation without the New Testament. At the time when Paul wrote to Timothy in 2nd Timothy 3 and said, "All doctrine is established by Holy Scripture," the New Testament hadn't been written! It's quite amazing, and yet in the minds of Christianity to this very day, the New Testament is all that really matters.

Over the years, you have probably been given copies of the New Testament with Psalms. Psalms, somehow, are important. Occasionally they add Proverbs. So the New Testament is privileged at the expense of the Old Testament. It's a very sad situation.

So, as Mr Armstrong did, let's ask ourselves, "Just what do you mean ... the New Covenant?" Do you understand God's covenant?

If we look at the term, "New Covenant" what is your immediate reaction to it? "It's the New Covenant because it replaced the Old Covenant, else why would it be called 'new'?"

Why would it be called the New Covenant? Maybe I have a little surprise for you there, because if you take the English word "new," and look at the Greek words that are translated as "new," you will find that there are SEVERAL DIFFERENT Greek words that have totally different meanings, that end up being translated as "new" in the New Testament!

There are two principle words that are translated as "new" in the New Testament. The first one is *neos*, which basically denotes "new" primarily in reference to time - the young, a "new" baby. Babies can only be new! They are recent. So time is very essential in terms of a "new" baby.

The second word is *kainos*, which deals with usage. It denotes the new, primarily in reference to QUALITY or something that is UNUSED! For instance, at the Passover, Jesus Christ said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another." Now He hadn't just created a new commandment to make the eleventh commandment! It's new because the Greek word is *kainos*. It is an UNUSED commandment!

The disciples had NEVER really loved one another. They could get at one another's throats and seek to get the better of one another very quickly! They had to come to understand that. The attitude that they displayed on the Day of Pentecost in 31 AD of being "of one accord," was a remarkable change for the fractious eleven! They had to start to use that commandment.

God very kindly provided us with a Scripture which uses both of the words together to provide understanding!

Matthew 9:14 Then the disciples of John came to Him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but Your disciples do not fast?"

15 And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.

16 "No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment ...

The King James Version states: "No one puts a piece of NEW cloth in an old garment." That is yet a different word that is translated "new," other than *neos* or *kainos*.

**16 ... for the patch pulls away from the garment, and the tear is made worse.
17 "Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new (*neos*) wine into new (*kainos*) wineskins, and both are preserved."**

Wine is something that is very time-dependent. Wineskins are not so time-dependent. The important thing about using a *kainos* wineskin is that it has not been used as a wineskin before, because putting fermenting wine into a wineskin takes all the elasticity out of the leather, out of the skin, so it cannot be used again for fermenting wine.

So Jesus was saying they don't put *neos* wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break and the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put *neos* wine into *kainos* wineskins, and both are preserved. They use an UNUSED wineskin for the NEW wine.

So the aspect is clearly established in the Bible as to the difference between the two words that are translated as "new." We read the English and gloss over it. We don't understand what is being said!

Let's change tack for a moment. Let's start at the beginning of Matthew. Let's pick up something here that is very, very important. This is a very scintillating way to start a book:

Matthew 1:1 The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:

If I wrote that for *Vision* it would be changed! We don't live in a world like this today, yet here is a very, very heavily laden verse that most of us gloss over. Jesus Christ is defined as the Son of David. We understand that. All of the prophecies were about Him being the Son of David, and about His role as the Messiah. So we can understand that, but it then goes on and defines both Jesus Christ and David as being the sons of Abraham! So Jesus Christ is firstly defined as being the Son of David, who is then defined as being the son of Abraham.

So it's worthwhile asking ourselves, why is Christ defined in terms of David and Abraham? Abraham is a very important person in the New Testament. He is called "The Father of the Faithful." He is called "The Friend of God." He is given commendations that most of us would die for! To be envisaged and appreciated by God in the way in which Abraham is referred to in God's Word is a real accolade to have.

Matthew provides some other information relating to Abraham as well. On this occasion, John the Baptist is speaking to the people of Judea who had come out to him to be baptised for the remission of sins.

Matthew 3:5 Then Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the region around the Jordan went out to him

6 and were baptized by him in the Jordan, confessing their sins.

7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

8 "Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance,

9 "and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones.

10 "And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

What is he really saying about Abraham? He is saying two things. People felt they had it made because they were a descendant of Abraham. They felt that physical descent from Abraham was all that really mattered as far as God was concerned. John was dispelling that notion very quickly.

But what else was he saying about Abraham? He said that Abraham was important because he did bring

forth fruit. He brought forth godly fruit - and if you are going to claim to be a child of Abraham, you have to bring forth righteous fruit as well, or else you are going to be cut down and destroyed. He is making a very, very powerful statement to these people.

Jesus Christ, in Matthew 7, talked about how there should be fruit produced. Picking up on this same thought that John the Baptist had provided to the Scribes and Pharisees of his day, He said:

Matthew 7:15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.

16 "You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?"

17 "Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.

Abraham had produced good fruit. He was a good tree. Jesus went on:

18 "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.

19 "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

20 "Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

So this responsibility of producing fruit becomes of great importance.

Matthew 8:5 Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him,

6 saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented."

7 And Jesus said to him, "I will come and heal him."

8 The centurion answered and said, "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed.

9 "For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."

10 When Jesus heard it, He marveled, and said to those who followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!"

11 "And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

... talking about the resurrection. They are going to come and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven. Abraham is not being resurrected to a physical resurrection. He is being resurrected to a spiritual resurrection, being part of the Government of God, as also is his son, Isaac and his grandson, Jacob.

12 "But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

So this aspect of a relationship with Abraham is very, very important in terms of Matthew's gospel, in terms of what God is revealing to us. What is He building on?

Yahweh and two angels came to Abraham prior to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. In the early part of Genesis 18 Abraham and Sarah are promised a son, whose name would be called "Laughter," because that is what Sarah did. It was a laughable concept; a very human response for an elderly lady in her nineties giving birth to a child. God said you will always remember you laughed, because every time you see him, you are going to call him "Laughter." His name was Isaac.

Having eaten with Abraham and Sarah, the Eternal and the angels went on their way to Sodom and Gomorrah.

Genesis 18:17 And the LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing,

18 "since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the

earth shall be blessed in him?

19 "For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him."

In other words, the true children of Abraham are those that "do righteousness and justice." The expression that is used is *tsedâqah* and *mishpat*, two expressions that are linked together and that talk about THE WHOLE SPIRIT OF GOD'S LAW, and of what God is looking for.

Abraham's children were defined as those who would live God's way of life, who would live the spirit of God's way of life. A very, very powerful statement is made here about Abraham.

It may surprise you that the reason Matthew 1:1 talks about Jesus Christ, David and Abraham is because those three individuals are ALL defined in God's Word in terms of this expression. Abraham was going to teach his children righteousness and justice - *tsedâqah* and *mishpat*.

David is recorded as being one who ruled Israel with *tsedâqah* and *mishpat*:

2 Samuel 8:15 So David reigned over all Israel; and David administered judgment and justice to all his people.

1 Chronicles 18:14 So David reigned over all Israel, and administered judgment and justice to all his people.

Solomon, the son of David, was told that he had to rule with *tsedâqah* and *mishpat*. He did for a period of time, but he fell away.

The other person of whom this expression is used is the Messiah, the real Son of David.

**Isaiah 9:6 For unto us a Child is born,
Unto us a Son is given;
And the government will be upon His shoulder.
And His name will be called
Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
7 Of the increase of His government and peace
There will be no end,
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,
To order it and establish it with judgment and justice
From that time forward, even forever.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.**

So here it says He is going to establish His throne with judgment and justice. Translators don't always do things consistently, but they are the exact same words that were used of Abraham and of David - *tsedâqah* and *mishpat*.

Matthew 1 is talking about the true genealogy that God is concerned about, the true descendants of Abraham, the people who bring forth spiritual fruits in their life as Abraham did.

Abraham was known by his fruit. As a result of that, he will have a very leading role in the Kingdom of God. We will all look to him as our father in a very profound way! You might say this expression, *tsedâqah* and *mishpat*, is the way in which God IDENTIFIES a child of Abraham! It's part of our spiritual identity. We have to ask ourselves, do I produce *tsedâqah* and *mishpat* in my life? Is it there so that spiritual fruit can be produced?

Abraham has a part in the Kingdom of God. I ask you, what covenant was Abraham part of? What was the nature of Abraham's covenant with God? It certainly wasn't the Old Covenant because that didn't come for another 430+ years. You might ask yourself about Noah, Enoch or Abel. What covenant would Adam and Eve have been under if they had eaten of the Tree of Life? Have you ever stopped to consider that?

The Bible talks about a "new" covenant. It does so in a particular way. It uses the term in Jeremiah 31:31, which Paul then quotes from in Hebrews 8.

Jeremiah 31:31 "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah -

In some ways, it is a New Covenant for them. Why? Because they already had an old one! They were already under the Old Covenant. They already had a physical relationship with the Eternal.

But the New Covenant was also a covenant that they had never "used." God writes His Word from the perspective of humanity, from our perspective in many ways.

What about the Old Covenant? What can we learn about it? In the Greek, which the book of Hebrews was written in, we have a number of words that are translated as "old." Greek has a lot more words than English for basic concepts. We then use adjectives, adverbs and similes to further define these words. The Greek has two principle words that are translated as "old." One is the word from which we get the concept of archaic: *archaios*.

However, the word that is used in Hebrews 8 is *palaios* or *palaios* depending on whether one takes the noun or the adjective. It is the idea that time dominates, whilst *archaios* often carries with it the suggestion of "nature," or "original character." We talk about a New Covenant in which the concept of time has no place whatsoever. It's not "new" in terms of just being made. It really is an UNUSED covenant.

On the other hand, we have an Old Covenant which is related to time. It is time dependent. We have an interesting view of the covenants. This same word that is translated as "old" in Hebrews 8 is also used in Hebrews 1.

Hebrews 1:8 But to the Son He says:

"Your throne, O God, is forever and ever;

A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your Kingdom.

9 You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;

Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You

With the oil of gladness more than Your companions."

10 And: "You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands.

11 They will perish, but You remain;

And they will all grow old (palaios) like a garment;

They will grow old as a garment, and they will be changed.

12 Like a cloak You will fold them up,

And they will be changed.

But You are the same,

And Your years will not fail."

Paul uses this aspect of "old" in a particular way, showing the corruptibility of it. It doesn't live for ever. It has no sense of eternity. Decay is a factor of it. It comes to an end.

The Greek word *kainos* is used by Jesus Christ when, at the Passover with His disciples, He said that the cup was the blood of the *kainos* covenant, the New Covenant. The New Testament is consistent in the way in which it defines the New Covenant as being unrelated to time.

In Hebrews 8, Paul, having quoted from Jeremiah 31, then sums up:

Hebrews 8:13 In that He says, "A new (kainos) covenant," He has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

So there is this aspect of the "old."

We have a New Covenant. In the book of Hebrews, another comment is made about that covenant which is most illuminating:

Hebrews 13:20 Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 make you complete in every good work ...

It is an EVERLASTING covenant! Some translations refer to it as an "eternal" covenant because the word can be translated each way. The fact that they chose the word "everlasting" here is probably a reference to their own theological preference because they couldn't see it as being an eternal covenant!

What are the lessons that we can draw from this? When commentators talk about the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, they try to define the new in terms of the old. "What carried over from the Old Covenant into the New Covenant?" That is the way they see it. This one ended and a new one began.

They don't contemplate the fact that Abraham was part of that covenant relationship with God as well, as were Enoch, Noah or Abel. Was that not the covenant relationship that God offered to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden?

What we really have is a covenant that was offered to humanity! It was offered to one or two, and then God provided an Old Covenant in the interim for a period of 1500 years. Then He offered that original covenant to people again after the sacrifice of His Son. The Church is founded upon that!

Let's turn things around a little:

The Old Covenant is defined in terms of the New Covenant!

Stop and consider that for a moment! Something is in the Old Covenant ONLY because it was in the New Covenant to begin with!!!

That turns the Bible upside down! Do you want me to prove it for you? Why was there a priesthood in the Old Covenant? Because there had been a priesthood called the Melchisedec priesthood before it! People who had a relationship with God were under that Melchisedec priesthood. Who is the Melchisedec High Priest? We now know Him as Jesus Christ! That is what Hebrews 7 tells us. The idea of a priesthood predated Levi by generations!

Why was there a tabernacle as part of the Old Covenant? Because there is one in heaven!! And that tabernacle has a relationship to those that God calls and works with.

So there are sacrifices as well, because there is an altar of offering there! There was a Passover who was "slain from the beginning of the world" as part of that covenant relationship!

What ended up in the Old Covenant only ended up there, because God had established it already!

The first friend of mine who left the Church (in 1974), a man for whom I had a lot of respect at the time, got to the point of saying, "You can't prove you have to tithe under the New Covenant."

No? Is that so? Where do we first learn about tithing in God's word? It is with Abraham and Melchisedec!

In other words, tithing ends up in the Old Covenant because God had ALREADY established it as being the right relationship that we should have to our Maker!!

This turns the theological word on its ear!

Where do you first learn about the Sabbath?

We may go through all these things that people claim have no relationship to the New Covenant. "We are free of these things." They like to take the Old Covenant and get a pair of shears out, cut it up and say, "I'll have that little bit, because that's in the New Testament, but I won't have that part. It doesn't suit me."

Where do we find the Sabbath introduced to humanity? It is when they are first given the opportunity to eat of the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden! So the Sabbath ends up in the Old Covenant because God has ALREADY established it as being the right relationship that people should have with Him.

What about the Holy Days? That is something people love to leave out of the New Covenant.

Genesis 1:14 Then God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years;

I read an article the other day in which was a comment that translators from the Hebrew are now coming to realise that the term "seasons" is an inappropriate translation for this verse! It shouldn't be "seasons," at all. It is for "assemblies" or "festivals." In other words, God established the firmament of the heaven to divide day and night, and they were to be for signs and FESTIVALS, and for days and years. It was the initial means of establishing a calendar so that people could come before God at the right time!

This is millennia BEFORE the Old Covenant came on the scene! So we ought to ask ourselves, why are the Holy Days in the Old Covenant? Because they already existed. They were already established as being the means whereby people were to relate to their Creator!

What does Melchisedec come out to greet Abraham with in Genesis 14?

Genesis 14:18 Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High.

19 And he blessed him and said: "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth;

20 And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." And he (Abraham) gave him a tithe of all.

Melchisedec brought out bread and wine to Abraham! Was this a Passover period of time? It is worthwhile considering.

When the angels came to Lot (Genesis 19), what do we find Lot providing for them? He prepared a "Feast" and "unleavened bread"! Was it because it was the time of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and that Lot understood the days were to be kept? He certainly came out of sin, in one big way!

What about Abraham in Genesis 15? He entered into a covenant relationship with God. God promised Abraham that his children were going to be in Egypt for a period of time. Then when we scroll forward to Exodus 12, it says the days of their captivity in Egypt were 430 years "to the very day" that God had promised! They came out on the First Day of Unleavened Bread! So that means when God made that promise to Abraham, it was the Days of Unleavened Bread!

You might say that we are reading into it, but that is what the apostle Paul does in Hebrews 7 and Hebrews 8! He lets us understand that the things that were part of the Old Covenant were only there because they were a picture of what was in the New Covenant, and what we are now under.

So we ought to ask ourselves, "Just what do you mean, New Covenant?" From what you can appreciate, very few people have an appropriate understanding of the New Covenant! They see it as being freedom to do whatever they want, whenever they want, however they want, without any instruction from God.

But in reality, the material that is in the Old Covenant is only there because God had ALREADY established it as part of His covenant relationship with Abraham, with Isaac, with Jacob, and with those others that He worked with.

So what do we mean by the New Covenant? It is a misnomer! What should we really call it? The Melchisedec Covenant? Yes, but that is not used very often throughout God's Word. We can certainly talk about an ETERNAL COVENANT.

Hebrews 13:20 Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,

It is a spiritual covenant! It's a covenant whereby the Law of God is internalised, is written in our hearts, so that we can produce the fruits that God sees as being fitting and appropriate. It's a covenant whereby we can be part of His Kingdom, so that we can join Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and those others that Paul lists in Hebrews 11, who by faith, have been able to enter that Kingdom. What was that faith associated with? It was associated with living the way of life that God had established for them.

So, as the Eternal said of Abraham, "I know him, that he will command his children to observe My ways, to keep My covenant. He set an example for us. Abraham was a human being with all of the foibles and all of the shortcomings that human beings have. Yet he used the power that God gave him, through His Holy Spirit to overcome those things, and to grow and develop, so that he can be the one through whom all human beings upon this earth are identified!

That doesn't take away from Jesus Christ, because how did Abraham get to have what he had? Because he had a Friend who became Jesus Christ! He listened to that Friend, so ultimately speaking, all of the glory goes back to Jesus Christ and the Father, the Ultimate Father! The Bible does present Abraham in that particular role as a PHYSICAL father, but only if we produce the fruit that comes through having God's Holy Spirit in our lives.

So consider that aspect: just what do you mean, New Covenant? It's something a lot more profound than most Christians have ever given thought to! It's something that you and I are privileged to have a part of so that we can rule with Jesus Christ!

... *Peter Nathan*
30 May 04

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